



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

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File Code: 3420

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David Borland
Forestry Program Leader
Bureau of Land Management
P.O. Box 27115
Santa Fe, NM 87502

Dear Mr. Borland:

This letter serves as a Biological Evaluation for your proposed Piños Altos Forest Pest Control project, and is based on observations made during our November 22 site visit. Maps, stand exam data, and prescription information are included with the project proposal.

The 99.4 acre project area, located within the upper Gila watershed, lies directly north and west of the community of Piños Altos, abutting the Gila National Forest on its north end. Additional private in-holdings, including residences, occur along the eastern edge of the unit. The forest here is predominantly ponderosa pine, with an understory that includes alligator juniper and several evergreen oak species. Topography is gently rolling, with elevations of 6800 to 6900 feet; site quality is low to moderate (60-70). Because of its relatively easy access, this area was a source of mining timbers in the early 1900s. Today's forest is dominated by 80 to 100 year-old trees, with a scattering of older pine. Dwarf mistletoe has a typical, patchy distribution within the area. Significant bark beetle activity has occurred--mostly within the larger infection centers--the past few years.

A primary management objective for this area is reduction in fire hazard, while maintaining or enhancing visual quality. The project would remove diseased and excess trees up to around 10" dbh. Some larger diameter trees may also be removed, pending a market for this material. Basal areas, currently ranging from 70 to 120 ft² throughout most of the unit, would be reduced to 40 to 60 ft². We recommend removing all dwarf mistletoe-infected trees < 5" dbh, but retaining some of the larger, lightly-infected trees to retain forest cover. Eliminating mistletoe from this area would be impractical and unnecessary.

The proposed project represents sound dwarf mistletoe management. Treatment here would also increase overall tree growth and vigor, reducing susceptibility to bark beetles. We usually recommend that thinning activities in ponderosa pine be conducted between July and December to reduce potential for outbreaks of ips bark beetles. Please contact me at (505) 842-3288 if you have questions about this evaluation or need additional assistance.

Sincerely,

/s/ David A. Conklin
DAVID A. CONKLIN
Forest Pathologist, Forest Health, New Mexico
Zone

cc: Gilbert Zepeda
Debra Allen-Reid



David A Conklin
John Anhold